



PRESS RELEASE

20 May 2022

## **Colchester Based Leprosy Charity with Royal Patronage Delighted with New City Status**

Lepra is delighted to learn that Colchester, its home since 1974, has been awarded city status as part of the Platinum Jubilee celebrations. This recognition of Colchester's history, vibrancy and cultural status comes at a particularly poignant moment in such a special year, as Lepra celebrates not only the jubilee, but looks forward to its own centenary in 2024.

Her Majesty The Queen has been Lepra's patron since her succession to the Throne on 6 February, 1952. She followed in the footsteps of her father, King George VI who was patron of the British Empire Leprosy Relief Association (BELRA), now known as Lepra. The Duke of Gloucester is Lepra's Vice President.

Jimmy Innes, the Chief Executive of Lepra said, "As a charity that has such royal support and heritage, it is wonderful to know that our Colchester home - with its own incredible history - has also received its special royal blessing. It's a time to celebrate for sure, even as we double-down and continue to do all we can to realise a world free from prejudice and disability due to leprosy".

Since 1924, Lepra has worked tirelessly in endemic countries to treat and support people affected by leprosy and lymphatic filariasis (LF). The charity currently works extensively in India and Bangladesh, taking a pioneering, person-centred approach, advocating for early case detection, building and strengthening community-led healthcare, fighting leprosy-related discrimination and providing a voice for the world's most vulnerable people; those people affected by leprosy and LF. In addition, extensive research is undertaken at the Blue Peter Health and Research Centre in Hyderabad, India, it too marking an important milestone this year, 25 years since the Blue Peter appeal raised £2.8m back in 1996/97.

Leprosy is a widely forgotten and deeply misunderstood disease and Lepra's Royal patronage has performed a vital role in helping to keep leprosy in the public's collective consciousness, reminding the world that leprosy still exists and importantly, is curable with treatment.

Her Majesty The Queen's deep empathy for people affected by leprosy, exemplified by numerous visits to overseas programmes, centres and UK based fundraising events, demonstrates the key role she has played in breaking down the barriers of prejudice and

discrimination. Without doubt, this has led to a cultural shift in the perception of leprosy, and greater care and empathy for the people which it affects.

Lepra congratulates Her Majesty on the occasion of her Platinum Jubilee, and the people of Colchester for this wonderful achievement!

### **About leprosy**

Leprosy is a communicable disease, caused by bacterium, which affects the skin and peripheral nerves of people. If left undiagnosed or untreated it can cause severe disability. A diagnosis often results in severe prejudice and discrimination. Leprosy can incubate in a human anywhere from 6 months to 20 years; and as a result, it is often difficult to diagnose the disease until it has already caused significant damage.

Millions of people are affected, with numbers continuing to rise. For over 7 million people across the world, leprosy causes damage to their health, livelihoods and futures. 600 people are diagnosed with leprosy every day and 50 of those are children.

### **About Lepra**

Lepra is a UK-based charity working in India and Bangladesh to change the lives of people affected by leprosy. Established in 1924, the British Empire Leprosy Relief Association (BELRA) was inaugurated by H.R.H The Prince of Wales (later King Edward VIII) at Mansion House in the City of London. We operated under this name for 40 years, before renaming ourselves the British Leprosy Relief Association (LEPRA) in 1964. We've been known simply as Lepra since 2008.

Working in India and Bangladesh, we find, diagnose, treat and rehabilitate people affected with specialists diagnosing leprosy by using skin test patch anaesthesia, skin smears and non-invasive sensory investigation. We also work tirelessly to fight the prejudice and discrimination they face in their daily lives.

To find out more about our work, take a look at our website [www.lepra.org.uk](http://www.lepra.org.uk) or via our social media channels



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